

Miss Betty's Christmas Gift

By HOPE DARING

Let me see! To-day is—yes, it is the tenth. Just two weeks from to-morrow is Christmas!

Miss Betty Dane, spinster, stood before a calendar which hung on her sitting-room wall. She was a plump little woman, upon whose face a faded pink flush still lingered. Her brown eyes were shy, and the brown hair rolled back from her brow was threaded with silver.

"Christmas!" she repeated, as she went back to her rocking chair. "I suppose a Christian woman ought not to say such a thing, but I dread the day," and Miss Betty wiped her eyes.

"I ought to be ashamed, and I am," she went on, rocking to and fro, "but it's dreadful never to have a Christmas like folks who have a family. Now I'm not repining because I'm an old maid, for I never saw the man I'd think of, not for years, anyway," the dull pink in her cheeks burned to crimson. "I haven't a relative in this part of the country, and I am so shy and bashful that I never get close to people. Sometimes I envy people, women, I mean, who get the pretty, dainty gifts that love prompts."

She sat a few minutes in silence, then resumed her half-articulate murmur:

"If I was poor—I mean needy, for I am not rich—the church would send me

Mrs. Hall looked after the plump little figure, baffled curiosity depicted on her face.

"Miss Betty is altogether too close-mouthed. It ain't becoming to a woman as lives alone."

Miss Dane soon reached her own home. It was fast growing dark, and as she entered the sitting-room the gleam of the coal stove seemed like a welcome.

"I'm glad to be back, but I am not sorry I went," she thought as she carefully laid her parcels on the bed. "It is going to be a cold night. I'll start the fires in the dining-room and kitchen before I put these things away."

A little later she stood by the dresser, the shades lowered, and her purchases set out before her. After her usual fashion Miss Betty communed with herself: "You were foolish, Betty Dane, to pay a dollar and a half for a china cup and saucer when you have more than two dozen of them now. But it is a beauty," touching the fragile porcelain with a caressing finger, "and there's nothing nicer to give a woman than china. There are two handkerchiefs. They are the sheerest, softest linen, and the embroidery is beautiful. I am not so sure about the book. The girl at the store said 'The Blue Flower' was one of the best-selling books of the season. But I did something worse than buying these things."

Miss Betty paused. Her eyes sparkled, and she trembled with excitement.

"You ordered two dozen red carnations sent up to yourself on Christmas eve. Yes, you did, Betty Dane. Well, I suppose you had a right to, only it's too bad there is no one else."

With a sigh she commenced her prep-

parade opposite me at table. Why, Miss Nesbit, I believe they have been waiting for you."

Florence threw both arms round the other's neck. "I can't thank you; there are no words to tell you what it means to me. I walked by your window three times before I could get courage enough to knock! Oh, you don't know how glad I am! It is like a beautiful Christmas present."

Miss Betty started, remembering her own longing for Christmas remembrances. Would not this girl's presence in the house be to her, in her loneliness, a gift that would partake of the Christmas spirit?

The days went by quickly. Much to Miss Betty's surprise she found herself busy with preparations for the coming holiday season.

There were the children in Florence's room. Miss Betty became almost an enthusiastic regarding the surprise planned for them as was the girl teacher. Then Miss Betty not only gave her usual contribution of money for the Sunday school tree, but she promised to go with Florence and help trim it. The basket for the church poor was filled to overflowing. To the one for Mrs. Carpenter Miss Betty added one of the handkerchiefs she had purchased for herself.

"I suppose it is foolish to send a woman in her circumstances such a nice one," she said, in a shame-faced way to Florence, "but women like—well, they like pretty gifts on Christmas."

Florence bent her sunny head and kissed Miss Betty. "It is dear instead of foolish. Why, Miss Betty, that is the Christmas spirit, giving the best."

The day before Christmas was clear and cold. There was no snow, but the earth lay brown and bare in the grasp of the frost king. Just as the shades of evening were beginning to fall Miss Betty emerged from the church where she had been all the afternoon.

"Come home to supper in an hour, dear," she called back to Florence, who stood in the doorway, her sunny head outlined against a mass of dusky evergreens. Florence nodded a smiling assent, and Miss Betty hurried on. She stopped for the mail and found a card from the express office. Calling there she received the package from the florist.

"I am so glad I ordered the carnations," Miss Dane said to herself. "Florence will be delighted with them. In the morning she shall take a few over to Miss Bliss, who is sick. I know Florence will be pleased with the cup and saucer. It seems almost providential that I bought it, for she does love pretty china. And I'm glad I have that other handkerchief for our minister's wife. Mrs. Perry is a real lady, and she doesn't have any too many of the pretty things women like."

Miss Betty was home by that time. In a trice she had the stoves open and the kettle on. As she took the scarlet carnations from the box and inhaled their spicy fragrance, a gurgling laugh broke from her lips.

"What a duncie you were, Betty Dane, to go and buy yourself Christmas presents! Why, I have given them all away but the book, and I wish there were some one to whom I could give that. I have learned that the blessedness of Christmas is in giving, not in getting."

She soon had the coffee and the water for the oysters on the stove. As she brought a dish of salad from the pantry she heard the door bell ring.

Miss Dane went forward and opened the door. A man's voice asked:

"Is Miss Florence Nesbit in?"

"Miss Nesbit will be here in a few minutes. Will you wait in and wait for her?"

"Indeed I will, ma'am. I am the child's uncle, and I have just come home from a long stay abroad to find that my poor sister lost all her money before her death. The idea of Florence teaching school when I've more money than—"

"Eh! Why, you are Betty Dane!"

Miss Betty looked up into the bronzed bearded face.

"Yes, Jack; I am Betty Dane!"

The man came a step nearer. "Betty, I was a hot-headed fool in the old days. You were right to throw me over and not to answer my letter, but it hurt."

"It hurts yet, Betty, for I have never loved any other woman."

The little spinster had grown very pale. Should she speak? It cost her a great effort to put aside her fatal shyness, but she did it.

"I never knew there was a letter, Jack; it did not reach me. I have been true to your memory all these years."

Florence came five minutes later. She found Miss Betty in the arms of her uncle, Jack Patterson. It took some time to explain matters. The delight of the girl almost equaled that of the elderly lover.

It was while they were at supper that Miss Betty looked up to say:

"Oh! I am so glad I bought that book! You don't understand, Jack, but I've a Christmas present ready for you."

Mr. Patterson's eyes twinkled.

"That is fine. I am sorry, Betty, that I have nothing to offer you, nothing but love."

Glad tears dimmed Miss Betty's sight. Her heart's hunger was satisfied. The perfect human gift—the image of the Gift that brought Christmas to the world—was hers.—Washington Home Magazine.

Mrs. Whittier's Strategy

By TOM MASSON

DON'T you think, dear, that it would be nice to spend our Christmas in Florida?"

Mr. and Mrs. Whittier were sitting in their cozy back parlor. As Mrs. Whittier turned to her husband with an anxious look of interrogation.

"Never," exclaimed Whittier. "Why, we couldn't afford it. What an idea! I couldn't dream of such a thing. Florida! I should say not!"

"I merely mentioned the matter," said Mrs. Whittier, seeing her error. "It is of no special consequence."

At the same time she eyed sadly a package of time tables and steamboat circulars that for the past week she had been surreptitiously collecting. To go to Florida had been the dream of months. And now it was ruthlessly shattered.

Still, Mrs. Whittier did not despair. "Well, if we don't do that," she said at last, "we must have a nice Christmas dinner, mustn't we?"

The thought of a dinner brought Whittier to himself instantly.

"You bet!" he said, rubbing his hands. "We'll have the best the country can afford."

"I sometimes wish," said Mrs. Whittier, after a moment, "that we had a houseful of children. It seems a pity to sit down to a Christmas dinner all alone."

"Well, why should we?" said Whittier. "Can't we ask some one in?"

Mrs. Whittier looked off into space with her eyebrows closely knit, as if the problem were too great for her to master on the instant. At last she said slowly:

"How would it do for you to ask Aunt Jane? She's getting along in years, and it may be our last chance to pay her any attention."

Whittier thought a moment.

"I guess you're right," he said at last. "I was looking forward to a Christmas dinner by ourselves. Still, Aunt Jane is a good old soul, and I guess we'd better ask her. But there's Cousin Emily, I suppose she'll have to come, too."

"Yes," responded Mrs. Whittier. "We shall, of course, have to ask Emily. We couldn't ask one without the other."

There was a pause. Finally Whittier spoke again.

"I suppose," he said, "if we ask Aunt Jane and Emily, that Uncle Henry and Georgiana will feel it."

"I had thought of that," replied Mrs. Whittier. "They've both been kind to us, and it would never do to offend them. Then, of course, the children—"

"Of course the children," interposed Whittier; "they'll have to come with their parents. Well, we'll have to do it, that's all. I guess we can stand it for once."

There was another pause. Mrs. Whittier at last looked meekly up.

"There's another thing, dear," she said, "that had occurred to me."

"What's that?"

"Well, you know there's my Aunt Sally. Aunt Sally is so sensitive. If she hears that your side of the family is coming, she'll feel it."

Whittier sighed. But the justice of the argument appealed to him.

"Yes," he said at last. "I suppose that's so. It's nothing more than fair, if my people come, that yours should, too. But you have a Cousin Rufus, and an Uncle William, haven't you?"

It was Mrs. Whittier's turn to sigh.

"More than that," she said. "Don't you remember Aunt and Uncle Ruby-ton and their children?"

Whittier got up nervously and paced the floor.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed at last. "What are we going to do? It's awful to dwell upon. We simply have got to ask them all. Why, it will cost a mint to entertain all this crowd."

He grew more excited.

"It's a fearful thing," he said, "to have relatives. We're in for it, I guess. We can't lop any of 'em off. Well!" he cried, turning to Mrs. Whittier, "have you nothing to suggest? You got us into it. Can't you get us out?"

Mrs. Whittier waited a moment before she replied.

"We might go to Florida," she said finally.

Whittier slapped his hands on his knees.

"Just the thing!" he cried. "Why didn't you say so before?"—Town Topics.

The Giving of Gifts.

The custom of giving presents at the New Year is older than our modern custom of Christmas gifts. In the middle ages it was the common usage in churches to display boxes for especially liberal alms-giving, in honor of the season. Parents gave their children, masters their servants and employers their apprentices small sums of money to put in the box. By and by the money came to be given in the form of tips. "Boxing day" in England is still the day following Christmas. The boxes very seldom remained in the hands of the recipients. Usually they were passed on to parents or sweethearts.

MISSOURI REPUBLICANS

Meeting of the State Committee, at St. Louis Addressed by Niedringhaus.

Every member of the republican state committee attended either in person or proxy the meeting of the committee at 2 o'clock on the afternoon of December 15, in the Commercial building, St. Louis. The meeting was open, and was also attended by many party leaders not members of the committee. It was announced that permanent headquarters would be maintained in St. Louis.

Mr. Niedringhaus said after the roll call:

"It gives me pleasure to meet with the men of Missouri who do things. And it gives me additional pleasure to celebrate them on their action and assistance in carrying the republican ticket on the day of election, November 3. By the record of the election, we see that 25,000 citizens of Missouri have endorsed the magnificent administration of President Theodore Roosevelt, and have expressed their continued confidence by electing him to the presidency for four additional years, owing largely to the standing of President Roosevelt, and the assistance of the people of the state of Missouri, a great



THOMAS K. NIEDRINGHAUS

There has been accomplished in the state, carrying it the first time for 24 years. This has largely, as I say, been done through the personality of our candidate for the presidency, with the assistance of the well-organized efforts of the members of the state committee. You are aware that I am not a speaker, but I want to burden you with an attempted speech. As you have not the purpose of speaking, but for the purpose of winning the campaign, and for the purpose of convincing the party for the future. We are not here for the purpose of discussing the political platform. We are here to discuss the business of the committee, which will not be discussed for the body.

In the past it has been the custom to close down the doors as soon as the committee was over, and to make an effort to get up the headquarters again. But before the next campaign, this is not to be the custom of the committee, but to the members of the same organization. When the election is over the next campaign, the body (Republicans) and in this respect, I want to say that I should like to carry out any policy this committee may determine to suggest. I outlined a plan for the future, and to make additional efforts to make a stronger organization in the state, and to be ready to carry out the recommendations of the body.

Since the tide has turned and Missouri has swung into the political leadership of the other great states of the Union, it is imperative for us to secure the means to carry on the organization in the state and in two years to be prepared to carry on the fight for the presidency. I want to thank the members of the committee for their hearty support and the confidence you have placed in me. It is a pleasant experience to me that I have occupied your confidence. I carry the republican banner which I have not been carried for many years. During the campaign, officers of the committee visited all parts of the state. This was what gave confidence to the party leaders, and that long before the election began, we were on the ground. We were on the ground at the time of the presidential fight.

Many of my party friends declared that I was over-enthusiastic, but if you will pardon a reflection, for two weeks before the election I showed that the state would be carried by the republicans. This position was based on reports made to the committee, based upon an income tax of every county and a complete list of a majority of them. From these it was apparent there would be a republican. Remember this as the state election was held in New York Herald, upon their report for an opinion on the election in the state. The state is then declared that Roosevelt would carry Missouri, and that we would elect eight congressmen, and that we would have a majority of seats in both houses of the state legislature.

Mr. Niedringhaus then reviewed the condition of the vote, and showed that no mistake had been made in the forecast. "With absolute confidence that the state can be made permanently republican, along with the states of Illinois, Indiana and Ohio," he continued, "I hope that the committee will establish permanent headquarters so that the staff can be made to that end. By doing this you will be able to go to the national committee in two and four years and say: 'These are our candidates, these are our chances, this is our record, and the committee will assist us in every possible way. I'm through, gentlemen, thank you.'"

Then, John H. Rothwell, of Sedalia, offered the following, which was adopted:

"Resolved, That the thanks and congratulations of the members of the state committee are due, and are hereby tendered to Thomas K. Niedringhaus, chairman of the committee, for his able, patriotic and successful service to the committee, the party, the state and nation during the late political campaign."

Chairman Niedringhaus announced that \$37,000 had been expended in the Missouri campaign, contributed by patriotic Missourians.

—St. Louis capital is said to be responsible for the system of underground transportation in Chicago.



"YES, JACK, I AM BETTY DANE."

a basket Christmas morning. Well, I'm thankful that I don't need that, and I always give something to help fill the baskets as well as money for the Sunday school Christmas tree. Mrs. Davison Green will send me a nickel pin. She has done it every Christmas for ten years, and I always send her a plate of my crullers. I will send Mrs. Carpenter a chicken and a few other things; she will return an elaborate note of thanks, every line beginning with a capital letter. There's Niece Tillie. She never fails to send me the new baby's picture. On the rare years when there is no new baby she sends me a card. Such things are all well enough, but they don't mean—"

Miss Betty stopped, rose, and walked aimlessly into the adjoining dining-room. After a few moments she returned to her former position. A determined look was upon her face.

"It'll do it. Why shouldn't it? The day after to-morrow I'll go to the city, and I will buy dainty little things such presents as a woman ought to have at Christmas. I will pretend to myself that they mean the love I am so slow learning to live without."

On the morning of the second day following Miss Dane left the village on the nine o'clock train. She did not return until four.

As she walked briskly homeward from the depot, her arms filled with packages, she was overtaken by Mrs. Hall.

"Why, lands aakes, Miss Betty! You don't mean to say as you've been to the city, do you? I didn't know as you was calculatin' on goin'."

"Well, I have been there," Miss Dane answered, a little diffidently.

"What'd you go for? You've got a new hat already, and your cloak was new last winter."

"I want to do some shopping."

"Land aakes! What'd you buy?"

Miss Betty threw back her head, her brown eyes staring straight ahead of her.

"I bought Christmas gifts. Good-by, Mrs. Hall," and, turning a corner, the half-frightened spinster hurried down a street that led directly to her own door.